

Understanding Parental Monitoring through Analysis of Monitoring Episodes in Context

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Abstract

A model of monitoring interactions was proposed that is based on behavioural principles and places episodic parent-adolescent interactions at the centre of analysis for monitoring. The process-monitoring model contends that monitoring is an interactive process between parents and their adolescents, nested within a social setting. In the model it is proposed that monitoring occurs in discrete episodes that change over the course of adolescent development. To explain monitoring interactions it is essential to expand research to include a functional assessment of monitoring exchanges between parents and adolescents and to also measure the quality of parent-adolescent relationships, consider adolescent age and development, parental characteristics, and the context of the family.

Keywords: parental monitoring, adolescent problem behaviour, parent-adolescent relationships

Parental monitoring is a hypothetical psychological construct that has been used to explain a composite of parenting practice variables including awareness, communication, concern, supervision, and tracking of adolescent behavior. Poor monitoring is consistently associated with antisocial behavior in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Patrick, Snyder, Schrepferman, & Snyder, 2005; Patterson, Capaldi, & Bank, 1991; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Patterson & Yoerger, 1997). Problem behavior has strong associations with deviant peers, and there is a flow on effect of further reducing monitoring (Ary, Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1999; Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991; Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Poor monitoring is also consistently associated with alcohol use, tobacco and substance use, higher sexual risk taking, poorer contraceptive use, lowered safe sex practices, and unwanted sex (Barnes & Farrell, 1992; Barnes, Reifman, Farrell, & Dintcheff, 2000; DiClemente et al., 2001; Li, Feigelman, & Stanton, 2000; Luster & Small, 1997; Metzler, Noell, Biglan, Ary, & Smolkowski, 1994; Reifman, Barnes, Dintcheff, Farrell, & Uhlig, 1998; Thomas, Reifman, Barnes, & Farrell, 2000). Poorly monitored adolescents are also more likely to report depressive symptoms, lowered self-esteem, and poor academic achievement (Crouter, MacDermid, McHale, & Perry-Jenkins, 1990; Gil-Rivas, Greenberger, Chen, & Lopez-Lena, 2003; Hartos & Power, 2000b). Despite the many studies that have shown poor monitoring is associated with problem behaviors in adolescents there are very few clinical studies reporting on interventions to improve monitoring. Of note is the work of Dishion and colleagues (2003) who recently demonstrated that it is possible to change parental monitoring and reduce problem behavior. More of this type of experimental intervention research is needed.

Patterson and colleagues (Patterson & Bank, 1987; Patterson et al., 1992; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984) developed the parental monitoring construct in their seminal work with the Oregon Youth Study. Presently there are two prominent monitoring definitions in the research. The original definition of monitoring is stated as: parental awareness of the child's activities, and communication to the child that the parent is concerned about, and aware of, the child's activities (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). The important aspect of this definition is that monitoring is a broad term that covers both structuring of the adolescents' environment, and tracking their activities.

The alternative definition comes from research by Kerr and Stattin (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Kerr, Stattin, & Trost, 1999; Stattin & Kerr, 2000) and purports that monitoring is defined by parental knowledge of adolescent activity and that knowledge depends on adolescents' willingness to disclose. This knowledge definition is narrower and focuses on parental knowledge of adolescent behavior during free-time. Knowledge

is determined by the outcome of monitoring interactions, that is, what parents know about free-time. Therefore, the knowledge definition does not include behaviors that are evident when parents and adolescents engage in monitoring interactions, for example rule-setting. In the studies of Kerr, Stattin and colleagues the constructs that were measured included solicitation, disclosure, trust, and knowledge of activities, although only the latter construct was purported to be 'monitoring'. Stattin and Kerr (2000) claim that monitoring rests on an understanding of the factors that determine adolescent disclosure rather than parental activity, and herein lies the greatest disparity in the two definitions.

The different approaches to monitoring have lead to a research debate over whether parental monitoring is a parent driven construct or an adolescent driven construct. In an attempt to clarify the influences on monitoring this paper argues for future research that examines the interactional process of parental monitoring. A process-monitoring model is proposed that can examine the interactions between parent-adolescent dyads. It is proposed that a definition of a psychological construct should have sound theoretical foundations and be driven by theoretical model building (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Research on parental monitoring can then test the model empirically and follow this with methods for intervention in families.

Commonly Measured – Rarely Operationalized

In a review of 117 studies on parental monitoring four key areas were found that limit the conclusions that can be drawn from the research (Hayes, 2004). Firstly, the majority of studies were found to be correlational with only 4 of the 117 studies reviewed using experimental methods to examine monitoring. Second, over time the definition of monitoring has drifted from its inception by Patterson and colleagues as a multi-dimensional construct of parent-adolescent interactions to either (a) a uni-dimensional self-report measure of parental monitoring knowledge, or (b) parental awareness of adolescent free-time activity. One outcome of this is that researchers rarely report on what monitoring looks like in situ. Third, the measures used to assess monitoring, with few exceptions (see Patterson et al.; Crouter et al.; and Pettit et al) have been parent or adolescent self-reports using short Likert scale questionnaires. Although research shows only moderate concordance rates between parent and adolescent self-reports are. The final methodological issue of importance is the appropriateness of making generalizations to typical families from research that is predominantly based on high-risk groups. A noted strength in the research is the increasing longitudinal work predicting monitoring in middle childhood from early parent and child factors (Patrick, Snyder, Schrepferman, & Snyder, 2005). This paper contends that the methodological issues in monitoring can be addressed by operationalizing the construct and using behavioral observations to measure the process.

A Process Model of Parental Monitoring

Where traditional models of parental monitoring tap only knowledge or supervision behaviors, the proposed process model incorporates all of the elements of parent-adolescent interactions that relate to monitoring. The central tenet is that parental monitoring is a complex interactive process between parents, adolescents, and their environment and should be assessed at micro and macro-social levels. The process model is shown in Figure 1, and comprises (1) an assessment of parent and adolescent behavior, (2) hypotheses of the function of this behavior and its cyclical process, (3) an evaluation of the parental characteristics that contribute to monitoring interactions, (4) an evaluation of the adolescent characteristics that contribute, and (5) considers the interplay of family context, peers, school, and community. The model is based on social learning principles and uses a behavior analytic framework to interpret the functional importance of monitoring interactions. In this approach an examination of the antecedents and consequences of behavior provides an explanation of the reinforcement contingencies, thereby providing understanding of why behaviors are repeated. It is argued that parental monitoring is a dynamic process and the proposed process model represents this.

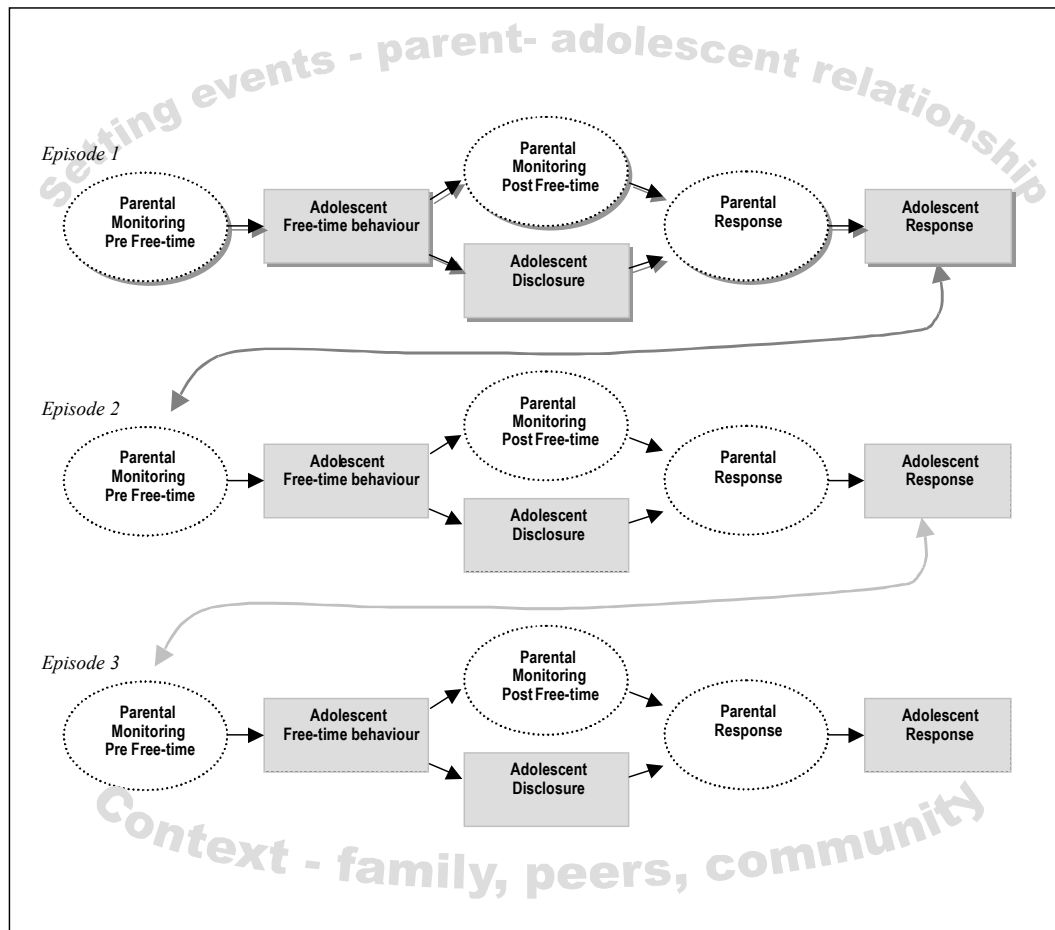


Figure 1. Process model of parental monitoring

The proposed process model shows a series of parental monitoring episodes, each in temporal sequence. Parenting behavior is represented by ellipses and adolescent behavior is represented by rectangles. This is because the behavior of parents may have different functions to the behavior of adolescents, and they must be analyzed separately. A monitoring sequence is explained by following episode one from left to right. Pre free-time monitoring represents the parenting behavior that occurs before adolescents go out. Pre free-time monitoring behaviors include parents making inquiries about where adolescents are going and what they plan to do, giving permission, finding out about peers, and setting limits and curfews. The next step shows the adolescent free-time behavior. This is time away from parents and may include being supervised by another adult (for example, a friend's parents), or may be with no adult supervision. The next phase shows what occurs when the adolescent returns home, and this has two elements. The adolescent can tell his parents what he has been doing (represented as disclosure), or his parents can solicit the information by questioning (represented as post free-time monitoring). Thus, post free-time monitoring behavior is the soliciting of information from adolescents about their activities, whereas adolescent disclosure is when adolescents freely discuss what they have been doing. The willingness of an adolescent to disclose their activity has been shown as a key factor to parental monitoring (Kerr et al., 1999). Post free-time monitoring would also include parental observations of adolescent behavior. The proposed process model demonstrates that both disclosure and post free-time monitoring contribute to parental response, which would cover the full gamut of possible parental responses, from expressing an opinion, delivering logical consequences, or yelling and lecturing. The adolescent response could be acquiescence or defiance, but their response is influenced by parental responses toward their independence.

A Functional Understanding of Monitoring Behaviors

The next step in understanding monitoring is critical; this is to consider the functional relationship of monitoring behaviors and how they evolve throughout adolescent development. If we assume that a child's behavior is a function of the environmental contingencies that maintain it (Serketich & Dumas, 1996) then examining monitoring exchanges in context are central to the paradigm. Yet this notion of monitoring as daily interactions is rarely overt in parental monitoring research. With young children much of parents' monitoring is directly shaping their child's behavior contingently when parents observe their child's behavior and respond with reinforcement or punishment. The proposed process model shows that each monitoring episode influences future parental monitoring behaviors and adolescent behaviors.

A lot of monitoring in typically functioning families is implicit and occurs within the daily exchanges of family life. Family members frequently share their experiences in a fairly routine manner, such as immediately when coming home or over the dinner table. When parents ask an adolescent "how was your day?" they are beginning a monitoring exchange. This type of interaction is a major socialization mechanism in which parents monitor their children and also share values and skills (Patterson, 1982). According to Patterson (1982) effective daily interactions are not lectures, merely brief discussions of prosocial behavior, often with humor present. For example, if an adolescent tells of a senior boy who was drunk at school, his parent's may merely reflect back by saying that he will be very embarrassed when he returns to school and very ill tomorrow. In this way, implicit values on appropriate behavior are shared in the warmth of a family discussion.

Avoidance, escalation and coercion are clinical markers of poor parental monitoring. Patterson's (1982) coercive family process model demonstrated that child problem behaviors begin with a break down of parental effectiveness. Frequent disciplinary confrontations result in increased coercive exchanges between the child and parents and consequently the child finds that aversive behaviors such as whining, crying, yelling, hitting, or having tantrums are effective in turning off the aversive disciplinary behavior of parents. In this way, the child trains the parents to use reactions that will terminate unpleasant parental behavior. Utilizing Patterson's (1982) research it is evident that monitoring behaviors would be developed and maintained within a well-rehearsed action-reaction sequence of parent and adolescent interactions with monitoring interactions in some families are likely to be characterized by lectures, attacks, and criticism. From an adolescent perspective coercive behavior towards parents acts as a punishment to the parent for asking monitoring related questions and reduces parental questioning. If parents submit to the aversive behavior from their adolescent it negatively reinforces the adolescent to act in aversive ways in future monitoring interactions. The parent is also negatively reinforced when the adolescent follows the parent's submission by complying with alternative non-threatening interactions.

When adolescent problem behaviors have become 'hot issues' the coercive process is likely to be performed many times in parental monitoring interactions. Incorporating a process model of monitoring into daily family exchanges we can see that advising parents to change one element of behavior only, for example increasing post free-time monitoring by asking their adolescent more questions, is unlikely to have the desired impact and improve monitoring. Instead, the reverse may occur where increased questioning leads to greater conflict or avoidance, and subsequently poorer monitoring. Importantly, the outcome of such advice may well increase aversive exchanges and this may then be followed with more avoidance and even more unsupervised time.

Thus, high or very low levels of conflict in parental monitoring interactions are likely to be indicators of clinical importance. Normative data shows that even in typically developing families, adolescents have several disagreements each day (Laursen & Collins, 1994); therefore, it seems reasonable to expect that monitoring may be a subject of disagreement. Furthermore, it appears that parent-adolescent monitoring dialogue is likely to be frequent, with opposing views and unresolved conflict. Clearly, adolescent behavior

toward monitoring is gradually shaped over time through daily interactions with their parents and the coercion model exposes how central avoidance and coercion are in monitoring research.

Monitoring through Rule-governed Behavior

As discussed above, contingency-shaped behavior is controlled directly by the consequences of behavior. In contrast, rule-governed behavior is defined as the behavior of following rules, generally because the rule includes a dependent consequence. While the distinction between rule-governed behavior and contingency-shaped behavior is debated in the literature (Reese, 1989), the assumption taken for the purposes of this analysis of monitoring is that verbal rules are used by parents in a different manner to the contingent behavior shaping process described in the previous section. It is only in late childhood and early adolescence that the cognitive ability to follow abstract rules develops, and rule-governed behaviors come to the fore (Grant & Evans, 1994). This occurs at the same time that adolescents begin to demand more time away from parents (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996). With monitoring, parental verbal rules for appropriate behavior become more important because the parent may not be present. Unlike young children who can be monitored via direct observations, if parents are to have input into their adolescents' behavior without always being with them, then they must use verbal behavior for socialization and setting limits.

An analysis of the properties of rule-governed behavior for parent-adolescent interactions is valuable. The principles of rule-governed behavior (Skinner, 1969) specify that verbal rules are more effective if consequences are dependent on rule following, and if the rule is clearly specified. Therefore, in monitoring we would expect that more efficient monitoring would occur if parents provide adolescents with clear rules, the consequences for misbehavior are clearly specified, and then followed through by parents. The properties of rules can be seen more clearly if we consider rules as having either (a) direct-acting consequences, or (b) indirect-acting consequences (Malott, 1989). In parental monitoring, a rule with (a) direct-acting consequences, for example, 'come straight from school and you can go to a friend's house at 5 o'clock' provides a clear and immediate consequence for appropriate behavior. The behavioral assumption is that this type of parental monitoring, based on direct-acting consequence-dependent rules, should have a powerful effect on adolescent and parenting behaviors. Malott (1989) states that behavioral problems occur when contingencies are not direct-acting because the negative consequences of not following rules are not immediate, probable, or sizeable. Hence in monitoring, rules that are based on (b) indirect-acting consequences are likely to have little influence in modifying adolescent behavior. For example a rule with an indirect-acting consequence, 'come straight from school and you might be able to have friends over on the weekend' may be ineffective because the consequences are too delayed, too improbable, or too small. In this example the adolescent must choose between the consequences of (a) hanging out with friends (a strong reinforcer), or (b) getting approval from parents by coming home and maybe seeing friends on the weekend (a remote reinforcer). Furthermore, there is little doubt that adolescents are keenly aware of parental styles and become skilled at weighing up the consequences of following or breaking parental rules. An alternative proposition is that rules are followed as an escape procedure, rather than as a relation of the consequence (Malott, 1982 as cited in Reese, 1989). In this way the functional consequence becomes not the one specified by the rule, but a negative reinforcer. Some adolescents may follow parental rules in order to avoid the guilt or anxiety of not pleasing parents. Thus, it is proposed that for some adolescents escape may contribute to rule following and this behavior may be important to monitoring interactions.

Most parents give verbal rule statements on a regular basis; however, Patterson (1982) found that in dysfunctional families rule-setting is noticeably absent. With few rules to set limits or curfews there is no agreed point at which the adolescent and parent can agree that discipline should occur. One would expect that in this case when a parent does provide a consequence for inappropriate free-time behavior the adolescent is likely to be defiant. This pattern has been noted by Patterson et al. (1992), who reported that coercive exchanges are more likely in families where the rules for family behavior or the roles of family members are

not clearly defined. Hence, an analysis of monitoring requires an understanding of the extent of rules in a family, the procedure for stating the rule, and the pattern of interaction that follows rule-breaking.

In the process model verbal rules are present at the pre free-time monitoring and post free-time monitoring points. Parents need to ask questions and give adolescents rules to follow. Surprisingly there is little evidence in the literature review showing the associations between verbal rule-setting and monitoring. Theoretically it would seem that parental monitoring based on direct-acting rules should have a powerful effect on adolescent and parenting behaviors, providing the consequences are consistently applied. Alternatively, rules that have indirect-acting consequences are likely to have little influence in modifying adolescent behavior because a strong immediate positive reinforcer like 'hanging out with friends', outweighs competing weaker negative reinforcement like 'avoiding a lecture from parents'. Research on verbal monitoring behavior in the pre free-time and post free-time stage is required.

The Parent-adolescent Relationship is the Foundation

The foundation for parental monitoring is the parent-adolescent relationship (Hayes, 2004; Laird, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 2003). Parent-adolescent relationship factors associated with monitoring include trust, communication, adolescent disclosure, and family conflict (Borawski, Ievers-Landis, Lovegreen, & Trapl, 2003; Hayes, Hudson, & Matthews, 2004; Kerr et al., 1999). Where parent-adolescent relationships are good there is a greater likelihood that higher monitoring would be reported. Further, parents' capacity to monitor is associated with their own psychological adjustment, family stress, poverty, and neighborhood safety (Chilcoat & Anthony, 1996; Klein & Forehand, 2000). In the process model, monitoring is embedded within the parent-adolescent relationship.

The model of parenting by Dishion and McMahon (1998) provides a useful framework for explaining how parental characteristics contribute to monitoring. Parental monitoring depends on parenting motivations, goals, values, behavior management skills, and the social context of the family (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). As stated above when the parent-adolescent relationship quality is poor the process of monitoring is likely to be marked by coercion and avoidance (Patterson et al., 1992). An assessment of monitoring demands an assessment of parent-adolescent relationships but this is not often seen in the research. Where the relationship is poor, the first step in improving monitoring would be rebuilding parent-adolescent relationships rather than suggesting parents elicit information about their adolescent's activities. The emphasis in parenting literature to have parents 'know where your child is' by merely asking more questions has not been tested and could increase aversive exchanges and resistance from adolescents and parents, leading to more unsupervised time.

Changes in Adolescent Contribution

An evaluation of monitoring demands consideration of the adolescent's contribution to the interaction. While it is generally expected that 'difficult adolescents are normal' in our society this notion is not supported in research. The research shows that adolescent emotional experience of the family follows a curvilinear path with early adolescents being less positive and experiencing a dramatic drop in family time (Larson et al., 1996). Just how monitoring evolves from parental control to adolescent independence is untested. Younger adolescents have reported more parental monitoring and monitoring appears to decline with increased independence and there is some evidence that monitoring changes with adolescent development (Hayes, 2004). Gender is also a factor with female adolescents tending to report higher levels of monitoring (Laird, Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 2003; Laird, Pettit, Dodge et al., 2003). The proposed monitoring model accounts for these developmental changes in adolescents by considering the temporal pattern of monitoring episodes. A different pattern of monitoring would be expected across adolescence, particularly in middle adolescence when this crucial time for vigilant monitoring coincides with the greatest strain in family interactions and adolescents increasing need for privacy.

Parents and Adolescents View Monitoring Differently

The concordance between parent and adolescent self-reports on parallel monitoring measures is generally quite low and often not reported. Correlations between parent and adolescent self-reports are moderate, ranging between .13 and .43 (Forehand, Miller, Dutra, & Watts-Chance, 1997; Hartos & Power, 2000a; Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2001; Wasserman, Miller, Pinner, & Jaramillo, 1996). The Swedish study by Kerr, Stattin and Trost (1999) stands out with a markedly higher correlation of $r = .43$ from 14-year-old adolescents and their parent. In a longitudinal study of African-American families evidence was provided of reduced agreement as adolescents age. Smetana and Daddis (2002) reported parent-adolescent correlations of $r = .32$ at time one when adolescents were 13 years, and $r = .17$ at time two when they were 15 years of age. This is possibly evidence of a typical reduction in parental knowledge that corresponds with adolescent striving for greater independence.

Generally, parents and adolescents do not report equivalent levels of parental monitoring knowledge. It is thought that parental self-reports of monitoring are a measure of parental perceptions, not adolescent behaviors, and therefore self-enhancing bias and social desirability are likely to affect parental reports of monitoring. Patterson et al. (1992) demonstrated this effect by comparing behavioral observations of parents to self-report data. They showed there is generally little correlation between what parents say they do and what they actually do. Thus, parental reports of their own monitoring are generally going to be higher than adolescent reports.

To overcome this dilemma, many studies have questioned adolescents on monitoring and excluded parents. However, there are also systematic differences in adolescent views of their family (Noller, 1994). In several studies, Noller (1994) has found adolescents have a generally more negative view of their families than their parents do, and they see their families as less cohesive. This evidence that adolescents can harbour negative attribution biases is important. If an adolescent is experiencing family problems, they may also report negative attitudes to parental monitoring. For example, they may report their parents do not care enough to monitor, or report that their parents are too strict. Thus, while adolescent self-reports are usually considered more accurate than parental reports, they remain a measure of perceptions of parental monitoring rather than actual parenting behavior.

In summary, self-reports of monitoring from parents are likely to be over-estimates of monitoring, and reports from adolescents may underestimate monitoring if family difficulties are present. Therefore, an understanding of the developmental path from poor parental monitoring to problem behavior is not likely to result from self-report data alone. Considering the monitoring interactions as outlined in the process model overcomes this dilemma because adolescents and parents contribute.

Monitoring is a Contextual Interaction

Finally, this proposed process model shows that parent-adolescent monitoring interactions are further influenced by contextual factors. Research has shown an important relationship between contextual factors and monitoring (Beyers, Bates, Pettit, & Dodge, 2003; Coley & Hoffman, 1996). Other important factors are likely to include extended family, siblings, family support, peers, school, community, cultural, socio-economic, and geographical area although more research is needed to understand these contextual factors. It is likely then that when parents or adolescents are questioned about monitoring their perceptions are framed within their context. While research shows parents have the greatest influence on adolescent free-time use the mediating role of peers and the community are important considerations.

Knowledge as an End Product of the Monitoring Process

Controversy surrounds the direction of effects in monitoring. Many researchers suggest that parents can change their adolescent's behavior by increasing monitoring and others argue that parental monitoring is dependent on an adolescent's willingness to be monitored. It is most likely that both are correct. However, it seems clear that a resolution to the challenge of establishing parent-child effects versus child-parent effects (see Brody, 2003; Capaldi, 2003; Kerr & Stattin, 2003a, 2003b) will only be achieved through experimental manipulation of the monitoring construct. We do not know if improved parental knowledge will resolve poor monitoring. Initial evidence suggests that adolescents can report engaging in problem behaviors even when they know their parents do not approve and their parents frequently report that they either suspect or are aware that their adolescents engage in problem behaviors (Hayes, 2004). It would seem that in high-risk or distressed families, some adolescents are determined to thwart parental attempts to keep track of them and requesting that parents improve awareness of adolescent activity may be futile, leading to higher conflict and greater avoidance.

Conclusions and Future Directions

A process-monitoring model of parent-adolescent monitoring interactions was proposed that argues monitoring is multi-dimensional and influenced by parents and adolescents. The model depicts the multiple levels of influence from parents and adolescents that are likely to occur within each monitoring exchange. Importantly, the model proposed that monitoring is evolutionary with each interaction dependant on previous episodes of monitoring, and influencing future monitoring.

The existing research has shown that parental monitoring is consistently associated with adolescent problem behaviors, including alcohol use, drug use, deviant peer relations, and poor academic achievement. Despite the consistency in the literature, there is some controversy about the direction of effects from parent to adolescent. It is argued that this controversy is resultant from few observational measures of monitoring. It seems clear that monitoring behaviors will be understood through sound theoretical model development and testing. With the ongoing development of the process-monitoring model, monitoring research will be able to elucidate the temporal sequence in monitoring interactions and the evolution of monitoring across the adolescent developmental cycle. It is argued that behavioral observations and functional analyses of monitoring episodes can provide an understanding of the action-reaction sequence across monitoring episodes. This would provide a strong foundation on which research testing clinical changes to monitoring behaviors can be evaluated.

Implications for Future Research

There is now a large correlational research base, which shows that when adolescent problem behaviors are high parental monitoring is lower. This finding is supported in monitoring research, irrespective of the stance researchers take on the direction of effects. It has been shown above that monitoring research still has considerable gaps to address. Future research that investigates the process of monitoring is needed and this requires new approaches to measurement that are broader than the current self-report methodology. It is argued that clarity in monitoring research can best be achieved through experimental and observational work. A continuation of behavioral observation methodology is likely to resolve many questions on parental monitoring and answer questions on parent versus adolescent contributions. Once monitoring behaviors are operationalised, they can then be manipulated and observations of the impact of 'increased monitoring' for both parent and adolescent can be evaluated.

Implications for Intervention

With regard to clinical intervention with families there is considerable work to be done. The research has demonstrated that relationship quality, pre free-time monitoring behaviors, and post free-time monitoring behaviors are strongly associated, and together they form the monitoring process. It is argued each of these factors must be accounted for in intervention work.

At the universal level of interventions, enhanced monitoring is not likely to occur by simply advising parents to ask more post free-time questions of their adolescents. It is hypothesized that increased questioning may even have a detrimental effect on monitoring interactions in some families. Similarly, educating parents to increase rule-setting, without attending to relationship issues or levels of conflict may be problematic, and may also contribute to increased coercive interactions. It seems more promising to consider that universal education for optimum monitoring depends on the quality of parent and adolescent interactions; parents can then be advised to have clear and consistent rules, set appropriate limits, have low conflict, and maintain open communication following free-time. It is important to acknowledge that in monitoring interactions there is a measure of personal agency from both parents and adolescents, and this must be accounted for in universal work with families.

Clinical intervention work on monitoring with high-risk families has only just become evident in the literature with promising results seen (see Dishion et al., 2003). This paper argues that conflict and coercion are key concepts in monitoring with problem families and an understanding of these interactions cannot be readily transferred from self-report correlational studies to clinical intervention. It is argued that a strong theoretical base and continued experimental investigation is needed in order to understand how to effect change in monitoring amongst high-risk families. The goal in monitoring interventions is to increase parental capacity to discuss their adolescent's free-time and maintain open communication about their activities.

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